

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MOUNT STURGEON HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Cavendish-Dunkeld Road DUNKELD

STUDY NUMBER: 134

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF MOUTAJUP

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 433 C-26; VicRoads 73 F4; located on the Cavendish-Dunkeld Road 3.5kms north-west of the township of Dunkeld and on the south bank of the Wannon River and immediately south-west of the summit of Mt Sturgeon

CFA 433 C-26, VicRoads 73 G4

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: State



Mount Sturgeon, Cavendish-Dunkeld Road, Dunkeld façade

Image Date: 9/12/02

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the buildings including the homestead (but excluding the interiors), the workers cottages, the cookhouse, the sheep dip, and the whole of the woolshed.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The homestead at Mount Sturgeon is in two main parts, the original dating from at least the 1850s and the major addition dating from the 1870s or no later than 1880. Very little remains unaltered of the original homestead. It was single storey and faced the mountain. A substantial chimney including a baker's oven indicates that it was built with a mixture of bluestone and Grampians freestone.

The two wings are separated by a passage way said to have been built large enough for a carriage to be driven through it. The new wing is also single storey although elevated on a podium. It is built of coursed rock face bluestone with Grampians freestone for the quoins around the doors and windows and at the corners. The U-shaped verandah is decorated with cast iron brackets and frieze set within a heavy timber structure. The timber columns are paired at the corners and at the front door. The concave verandah roof and the hipped roof of the main wing are corrugated iron. The eaves have paired timber brackets. The windows opening onto the verandah are French doors, relatively old-fashioned for the time, with fan lights above. The front door is within a substantial entrance including side and fanlights. Only the side lights are subdivided by glazing bars. An old gas light fitting, converted to electricity, hangs outside the front door.

Internally the hall and two principal rooms are decorated conservatively with conventional plaster details. Although no early decoration survives the plasterwork and joinery survive well. The fireplaces are in the wall opposite the façade. The mantels survive. A large vestibule door at the end of the hall leads to the passage between the two sections of the house. Recent alterations and additions, sympathetic to the scale and form of the two wings, have provided further modern accommodation. No substantial garden or plantings survive near the house.

The row of workers cottages and a cookhouse begins some distance from the house and leads to the woolshed. The cottages and cookhouse also face the mountain. They are conventional in plan, built of coursed bluestone, and have hipped roofs. Each has a substantial chimney. They have been converted recently into short term accommodation with new services located in large corrugated iron "tanks" at the rear.

Near the woolshed there is a brick sheep dip set into the ground. It has paved areas around it and adjacent to it there is a bluestone structure with a chimney, apparently the base for heating tanks of water. A curved fence with a path of Grampians freestone would lead the sheep from the nearby yards. The woolshed's plan is unusual with three wings, one long and two short. The central wing of bluestone perhaps older than the rest and the end wing may be later. The three wings have separate corrugated iron roofs. The roof on the central wing is a simple hip. The roof on the long wing was a double hip but has been converted to a single large hip. The end wing has a half hip with small gables at the ridge line. The central wing is built of relatively crude coursed bluestone and has one large door at its end. The long wing is built in large sections of bluestone and Grampians freestone. It has arched openings providing access to the sub-floor. The end wing is much better built in bluestone with freestone quoins and lintels. The smaller doors and windows suggest that this was used for the storage of wool bales although it has square openings providing access to the extensive sub-floor. The outer wall, opposite the central wing and along the shearing board is weatherboard. The wall at the south-eastern end includes a massive bluestone chimney. The woolshed has been extensively modernised, to the extent that the long wing has been almost rebuilt, so it can be used for functions as well as for shearing. The trussed roof at the south-eastern end appears to be entirely new while a new single roof covers the former double-hip. The internal sheep pens survive and there are yards outside.

HISTORY:

Doctor Robert Martin took up the licence, Portland Bay No. 192, for the Mount Sturgeon squatting run in 1839 (B&K, 253). This makes it one of the earliest to be established in the Western District and one of the oldest continuously settled sites. The surveyor, Charles Wedge, includes Martin in his list of the first settlers on the Wannan River (Bride, 87). Martin seems to have employed a manager, a Mr. Knowles, on Mount Sturgeon,

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rather than have lived and worked there himself (Bride, 266 & 290). At the time it comprised 112,000 acres, had 1,000 head of cattle and ran 20,000 sheep. It is located on the Wamnon River, at the foot of one of the most dramatic peaks in the Grampians, Mount Sturgeon. Dr Robert Martin M.D., who was an Overlander, was born in Skye in 1798 and died at Heidelberg in 1874 (VPI, Reg. No. 7917). His home in Heidelberg, which he held from as early as 1847, was called View Bank (Peters, 1996). He gave Banyule at Heidelberg as a marriage gift to his son, Robert William Kirby Martin who married Mary McCrae (Minnie) Graham, the daughter of James Graham, in 1874 (Mouritz, 110; Bride, 88n; VPI, Reg. No. 3927). He and his wife, Lucy also had three daughters born at Heidelberg, called Charlotte, Emma and Edith. Martin held Mount Sturgeon until February 1859 when the licence was taken over by Hugh Glass.

Hugh Glass (1817-1871) was a speculator, squatter, businessman and notorious politician (Senyard, 254-5). In Melbourne, Hugh Glass and his wife Lucinda (Lucy) lived at Flemington House, 'a former sheep run "quite out of town", after their marriage in February 1852', developing it until it was probably the grandest Italianate suburban villa in Melbourne (Lane and Serle, 283-4). Mount Sturgeon was only one of his many runs and not necessarily amongst the most important to him. "By the early 1860s he was at his peak; in 1862 he was reputed the richest man in Victoria, worth 800,000 pounds" (Senyard, 254). But, in the mid 1860s, he was forced to purchase much of his leased land under the Selection Acts using dummies and borrowed money. This was exacerbated by drought in the 1865-66 and 1868-69. By the late 1860s his empire was vulnerable and in 1869 his estates were in the hands of trustees, with debts of over 500,000 pounds. About the same time, "a select committee found him guilty of taking part in corrupt practices and parliament committed him to gaol" (Senyard, 254). The Chief Justice, Sir William Stawell, a former partner of Glass, reversed the decision but his political career was over. He died in 1871 probably from an overdose (VPI, Reg. No. 3841).

Hugh Glass sub-divided the run into four parts in 1862. Hiscock's 1874 map of the County of Dundas includes Mount Sturgeon as Mount Sturgeon No. 1: 30,000 acres, H. Glass, 26,000 sheep and Mount Sturgeon No. 2: 38,000 acres, H. Glass, 31,200 sheep. In 1865 the section containing the homestead complex passed to Charles Henry Armytage (1824-1876) and George Fairbairn (B&K, 253). Charles Armytage was the son of George and Elizabeth Armytage, the Tasmanian pioneers who had arrived in the Port Phillip District in 1836, settling in the area immediately west of Geelong. Charles married Caroline Morrell Tuckwell in 1856 and at first lived at their squatting run, Fulham north of Balmoral (VPI, Reg. No. 2438). They then lived in Melbourne at Como, which they purchased in 1864 (Selzer, 35-43).

At that time, Mount Sturgeon comprised 11,000 hectares, carried 30,000 sheep and 300 cattle. "Its wool clip brought 10,000 pounds a year. To help finance his growing investment [Charles] entered a partnership with George Fairbairn (his brother-in-law) in 1865-1866" (Selzer, 87). George Fairbairn had married Virginia Charlotte Armytage, the daughter of George and Elizabeth Armytage, in 1854 (VPI, Reg. No. 125). For nearly three years, from July 1866 until April 1869, July 1866, the Trust and Agency Co. is listed as holding the Mount Sturgeon licence. It then transfers to George Armytage and Robert W. Nutt. In January 1872, Charles Henry Armytage is the licence holder. The licence was cancelled in December 1880. Although it was never a permanent residence, the Mount Sturgeon homestead complex was developed to be the flagship of the Armytage family's pastoral properties.

As with Robert Martin and Hugh Glass, Charles Armytage employed a manager at Mount Sturgeon. He was Leandre Clarke, a cousin of his wife Caroline (Selzer, 92-3). Clarke was in regular contact with Charles reporting on the condition of the sheep, requesting special funds for purchasing tools and equipment and, importantly in the 1860s during the Selection period, advising him on land as became available for purchase. "On the 29 February 1876, The Horsham Times reported on investigations into allegations that employees of Charles Armytage's Mount Sturgeon and Fulham runs were dummies" (Selzer, 96). The Land Board instituted an enquiry and, eventually, some of the individuals accused had their land forfeited in 1876. Harold Armytage (1863-1926), the third son of Charles and Caroline, and who remained a bachelor, managed Mount Sturgeon for his mother from 1885 and into the early twentieth century (Selzer, 52, 59, 103). The Western District

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Sheepfarmers Association notice to shearers in 1888 names H. A. Armytage as the owner of Mount Sturgeon and Fulham and that there were 25,000 sheep to be shorn at the former after the shearing at Fulham. The same men were to be paid 13 shillings per 100 head, the standard rate. Harold, who had worked at Dalgety & Co., in his youth, became a director of the company. He built Delgany as his seaside retreat at Portsea (Selzer, 103).

Daybooks survive from the time, which give a clear picture of life on Mount Sturgeon, particularly about the workers. Margaret Kiddle write "For the 28,000 acres of Mount Sturgeon, for instance, 130 men were considered necessary to tend approximately 30,000 sheep and 300 cattle. The designations and duties of such men varied. At Mount Sturgeon during the sixties and later there were a superintendent (because the owner was absent), a head overseer, three working overseers, six boundary riders, fifteen shepherds, a saddler, bullock drivers and stockriders, besides several hut cooks, a thistle-cutters; cook, a stone mason, a ploughman and a number of boys. ... And apart from the permanent hands there were always large numbers of casual labourers. At Mount sturgeon besides the permanent hands there were no less than eighty-two labourers, forty-seven thistle cutters, eight hut cooks, thirteen boys, four bullock drivers and six boundary riders. There were also fifty-eight carriers and forty-two fencers engaged in contract work. Shearers, sawyers, splitters, kangaroo and rabbit trappers, and horse breakers, were all seasonal and often picturesque characters" (Kiddle, 285-6)

It seems likely that Robert Martin was responsible for the construction of the substantial early homestead, the bulk of which survives although now much altered and extended. It appears to have been a simple, single-storey, and symmetrical vernacular structure. It is clear that the homestead was oriented towards the dramatic peak of Mount Sturgeon, which was then reinforced. It is not certain when the original homestead at Mount Sturgeon was extended by the addition of a range of large formal rooms across the front. Its deeply conservative Italianate style, symmetrical form and materials are typical of the 1870s. Its construction could be associated with either the transfer of the squatting licence to Charles Henry Armytage in 1872 or the cancellation of the licence December 1880. It seems likely that it was built before the premature death aged fifty-five of Charles Henry Armytage in 1876. No architect or builder has yet been associated with the design and construction. Although several competent architects were practising in the Hamilton area, the most likely possibility is Arthur Ebden Johnson of Melbourne who was Caroline Armytage's brother-in-law. He had married Laura Maria Tuckwell in 1860 (VPI, Reg. No. 1348). He designed substantial renovations and extensions at Como in the 1860s and later in 1874 when the ball room wing was added (Selzer, 10-11). The long, distinguished and successful partnership of A. L. Smith and A. E. Johnson is known to have been active in the Western District. They designed Minjah homestead in the early 1870s, branches of the Bank of Victoria at Peshurst, Merino and Coleraine in the 1870s, and the Hamilton Club in 1878, for example. In Melbourne, the firm designed the Law Courts and the Post Office.

The present Mount Sturgeon woolshed was built in stages, The oldest section may date from the Martin period. The long section which appears to date from after 1860, was built either by Hugh Glass or by the Armytage family (HS 26/10/1999). The last section in the south-west corner is the best built. The workmanship of the stonemasons varies, the early section being relatively crude. The walls of the last section are finely shaped bluestone used as coursed random rubble, and the quoins around the airspaces, windows and doors are Grampians freestone. At its peak, the shed had 32 blade stands to cope with shearing up to 32 000 sheep. While it has been extensively renovated in recent years, the large holding pens at the rear of the shed are original and unaltered. The original sheep dip is still evident. The nearby workers cottages, almost certainly of the same date as the woolshed, have been also been extensively renovated in recent years (HS 11/04/1987).

While he kept Fulham, Mount Sturgeon must have held special value to Charles Armytage. In his will he stipulated that it should not be sold "until the youngest surviving child of Charles was 21 years old or married" (Selzer, 42). When he died in 1871 at the age of 55, "his personal property including the livestock on the Fulham and Mount Sturgeon stations was valued at lightly over 26,641 pounds. His real estate, including the freehold land of the two stations, was valued at over 114,267 pounds. He had other businesses such as mining developments and, once debts were paid, he left over 130,000 pounds" (Selzer, 43). Caroline died in 1909.

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“Before 1930 the surviving children of Charles and Caroline had divided the title to Mount Sturgeon station and formed the Armytage partnership” (Selzer, 103). The management of the pastoral properties fell increasingly on the two youngest unmarried daughters, Leila and Constance. They had continued to live at Como but visited their country estates and the Geelong wool sales regularly (Selzer, 103). In 1948, the sisters sold Mount Sturgeon and Fulham to the Soldier Settlement Commission. The former comprised 27,277 acres which was sold for eight pounds and two shillings an acre.

Mount Sturgeon was then subdivided in three stages. A full list of the thirty settlers is given in Dunkeld and District, a Short History (Clabburn, 75). The new owner of Mount Sturgeon was Charles Rochfort (or Rocheford) (HS 02/11/1999). In March 1951, two Italians, one Hungarian and three Lithuanian families moved onto Mount Sturgeon as a part of the team to build the Soldier Settlement houses. They worked for a contractor named Evans. After the death of Charles Rochfort, the Armytage family purchased the homestead block. It was later sold to Alan Myers Q.C., a member of a local family.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

Theme 5: Working

5.8 Working on the land

CONDITION:

all the buildings are in excellent condition.

INTEGRITY:

Fair degree of integrity

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Mount Sturgeon squatting run was established by Dr Robert Martin in 1839. He was a medical practitioner who lived permanently in Heidelberg on the outskirts of Melbourne. It seems likely that he built the original sections of the homestead complex and possibly the oldest part of the existing woolshed. The Martin family was linked by marriage to the family of James Graham, an important early Melbourne merchant and pastoralist. The next owner of Mount Sturgeon was Hugh Glass of Flemington, a speculator, squatter, businessman and notorious politician. He was reputed to be the richest man in Victoria before his financial, political and social collapse and then his death in 1871. He had already subdivided the run and sold Mount Sturgeon to the Armytage family in 1865, in an attempt to recoup his losses. Charles and Caroline Armytage of Como in South Yarra, who had lived at Fulham near Balmoral before retiring to the city, developed Mount Sturgeon rather than Fulham, as their principal pastoral property. The grand new front wing of the homestead was probably built before the death of Charles Armytage in 1876. It is archly conservative in style, form and materials. No architect or builder has yet been associated with the design and construction but Arthur Ebdon Johnson, the brother-in-law of Caroline Armytage and who worked on Como and in the Western District at the time, is very likely. Little remains of the original homestead after recent alterations and extensions but the 1870s wing is substantially intact and the whole is in excellent condition. The woolshed which was built in three stages, the sheep dip, cookhouse and workers' cottages all survive. They retain different degrees of integrity and are all in excellent condition. Mount Sturgeon remained in the Armytage family's possession until it was sold to the Soldier Settlement Commission and subdivided in stages into thirty smaller allotments.

How is it significant?

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Mount Sturgeon Homestead Complex is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria and to the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

Mount Sturgeon Homestead Complex is of historical significance as one of the best examples of a squatting run managed for an absentee metropolitan owner, specifically: Dr Robert Green, of Heidelberg; Hugh Glass of Flemington; and most importantly, the Armytage family of Como, South Yarra. Although Mount Sturgeon, after Fulham, was the second major squatting run owned by Charles and Caroline Armytage and their children, it was the property which became the family's flagship. Mount Sturgeon is a typical example of soldier Settlement after the Second World War. Mount Sturgeon Homestead Complex is of architectural significance for its sequence of development, the conservatism of its major, although unusual, extension.

COMPARISON:

Fulham Homestead, Kanagulk
Como, Como Avenue, South Yarra

ASSESSED BY: tfh

ASSESSMENT DATE:

07-Dec-03

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
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James Smith	Cyclopaedia of Victoria, Vol 2	1904	533
Margaret Kiddle	Men of Yesterday	1961	285-6
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S. J. Peters	Viewbank Homestead, Heidelberg: an historical survey	1996	
Terence Lane and Jessie Serle	Australians at Home	1990	283-4